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ABSTRACT

Rhetorical criticism focusing on Norman Rockwell's paintings of the "Four Freedoms" provides reasons for the paintings' effectiveness within the context of Franklin Roosevelt's campaign to educate Americans about participation in World War II. The epideictic icons in Rockwell's paintings promoted identifications that constitute the tenets of a conjoined religious and political perspective. Rockwell's method of establishing these identifications had at least three salient characteristics: (1) he based the identifications upon institutionalized American values that represented focal points for American unity; (2) he utilized images that traditionally were intimately associated with people and scenes within the institutions in order to establish identification with respect to those institutions; and (3) within these images, Rockwell provided productive ambiguities that enabled him to fuse symbols from different people and scenes, thereby broadening the range of symbols with which the viewer could identify. (RL)

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"FDR's 'Four Freedoms' Campaign: The Rhetorical Contribution of Norman Rockwell's Posters"

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INTRODUCTION:

The beginning of World War II saw much disunity over national purpose characterized by salient divisions between isolationists and interventionists. Consequently, the Roosevelt administration faced a need to educate the public on behalf of supporting the war effort. Norman Rockwell's four posters, "The Four Freedoms For Which We Fight," became an integral part of that educational campaign. According to Thomas Buechner:

> Millions of copies were printed and distributed by the government and private agencies all over the world; the Treasury department toured the four originals to sixteen cities where they were seen by 1,222,000 people and used in selling $132,999,537 worth of war bonds. For many Americans World War II made sense because of the goals depicted in the "Four Freedoms."

The ideal of the "Four Freedoms" first gained widespread public attention on January 6, 1941 when Roosevelt gave his "Annual Message to Congress," perhaps better known as the "Four Freedoms" speech. The statement on the Four Freedoms justified increased financial support of Britain and seemed to strike a common chord in American values:

> In future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.
>
> The first is freedom of speech and expression--everywhere in the world.
>
> The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way--everywhere in the world.
>
> The third is freedom from want--which, translated into world terms, means economic understanding which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants--everywhere in the world.

> The fourth is freedom from fear--which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor--anywhere in the world.

These, then, were the Four Freedoms--freedoms which echoed sentiments of the American Constitution and which, Roosevelt claimed, should be protected for America and the world.

Subsequently, the "Four Freedoms" became a theme in several of Roosevelt's speeches. Roosevelt associated the Four Freedoms with the religious ideals of Americans by comparing them to the Ten Commandments, by referring to them as blessings, and by describing them as "the Christian Ideal." Roosevelt equated the Four Freedoms with major accomplishments throughout civilized history such as the Magna Carta, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Atlantic Charter. He also associated the Four Freedoms with the essence of American political ideology by equating them with the democratic process and with the "very life of this nation." Roosevelt linked the Four Freedoms with human survival by relating them to sustenance and with life itself. He associated them with idealism in general by calling them the means to achieving the "greatest age of man" and by affirming that they are glorious ideals that have featured into every milestone in human progress.

Roosevelt placed this wide-ranging conception of the Four Freedoms in direct opposition to the Hitler leadership in Germany and the ideas associated with it. While the Four Freedoms represented religious ideals, the Germans represented "pagan brutality." Whereas the Four Freedoms represented freedom and democratic processes, the Germans represented "slavery" by forbidding the Four Freedoms. Whereas the Four Freedoms

were blessings, the Germans offered only deprivation. While the Four Freedoms represented sustenance and life itself, the Germans represented brutality, withering, and death. Roosevelt went a step further in the early speeches by identifying Germany and these consequences of German domination with the counterproductive stance of "unwitting appeasers" such as the isolationists.

These equations in Roosevelt's rhetoric filtered into numerous speeches, essays, stories, paintings, conversations, press reports, and generally into the public awareness, so that by the time the Saturday Evening Post first distributed Norman Rockwell's version of the "Four Freedoms" in February and March of 1943, the Four Freedoms were already serving several functions in Roosevelt's campaign. Initially, in 1941 the Four Freedoms served primarily to silence the isolationists and to justify increased financial support of Britian. The Four Freedoms also served to educate and to unify American citizens by articulating clearly the ideals of the country. Later, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Four Freedoms served as an additional justification for American entry into the war. During the war, they served to boost American morale. Eventually, with the government-sponsored tour of Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" paintings and the mass distribution of the four posters, the "Four Freedoms" functioned to raise money by promoting the sale of war bonds during the final war years.

NORMAN ROCKWELL'S "FOUR FREEDOMS:"

When Rockwell first offered his posters of the Four Freedoms in 1941 as a gift to the government, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morganthal

refused Rockwell's offer. The Department felt no need to dabble in art. Subsequently, the four paintings were published originally inside the Post in four consecutive issues between February 20 and March 13, 1943 under the heading "Number ____ in a Series Depicting the Four Freedoms for Which We Fight." Response from readers was overwhelmingly favorable. Then the government requested the right to use the posters in the drive for war bond sales, printing and distributing over four million copies.

Each illustration was accompanied by a text by one of four well-known authors: Will Durant, Booth Tarkington, Carlos Bulosan, and Stephen Vincent Benet. These texts in the Post all followed a similar form. They focused first upon the meaning of the freedom in the United States, then upon the German antithesis, and finally upon a call to battle in light of the merit of the freedom. These texts reflected the range of equations in Roosevelt's speeches, assuring that such ideas were in the viewers' thoughts.

Even the titles of the paintings --"Freedom From Fear," "Freedom from Want," "Freedom of Speech," and "Freedom of Worship" -- are rhetorically functional. They were a framing device that evoked what the historian Robert Bellah called the "sacred scripture"of civil religion. Roosevelt's speeches had earlier associated the Four Freedoms with the Constitution, with the Declaration of Independence, and with milestones in human progress, thereby promoting such a rhetorical function. Rockwell further developed his appeal by employing images basic to values associated with six institutions: the church, the family, the community, the educational system, the work ethic, and the democratic process.

Institutionalized values associated with the church and the fundamental belief in God were central in the paintings, though the paintings

were clearly nondenominational. In particular, "Freedom of Worship" portrayed "people of different faiths joined in the act of prayer. Heads, seen in profile, and hands fill the canvas." One woman clasped a rosary, a man held a black book and wore the clothing of a Greek Orthodox church member. An elderly woman pressed the palms of her hands together, touching them to her lips. Another person rested his chin on his hand, perhaps thinking intently, perhaps listening to a sermon. The rosary, the book, the clothing,and the folded hands were all images that evoked people, scenes, and acts within the church. The poster presented a spectrum of images of hands folded in different ways, and this may have encouraged viewers to identify with the image most similar to one's own position for prayer. More importantly, the poster emphasized variety itself as a salient feature of American religious expression. In "Freedom of Worship," Rockwell portrayed representatives from different faiths, different racial backgrounds, different ages, and different sexes, providing a spectrum of people that most Americans could identify with. Despite the divergent backgrounds and views represented in the painting, Rockwell presented a view of religious unity rather than religious squabbling. Furthermore, he fused these symbols into an ambiguous scene; little in the painting indicated a location beyond a community of religious expression sharing faith in the existence of God in common. In gold lettering, similar to that used in many churches, Rockwell expressed the message: "Each According to the Dictates of His Own Conscience."

Rockwell repeated this appeal to religion in the other paintings. For example, in "Freedom of Speech" the people sat in pews, rather than in desks as in most educational settings. In "Freedom from Want," Thanks-

giving was a religious holiday, a time to thank God for his bcuntiful gifts, and the folded hands in the lower left corner may have suggested the ritual of prayer. Belief in God may also have been implicit in the simple gold wedding rings which appeared in three of the four paintings, since to most Americans marriage was ordained by God.

Another pervasive appeal to institutionalized values centered around the family. Obviously, "Freedom from Want" and "Freedom from Fear" portrayed family scenes--one at meal time and the other at bedtime. "Freedom from Want" featured a family gathering on Thanksgiving as indicated by such images as a huge turkey and a pile of food resembling a horn of plenty. A Grandmother "places a turkey, that most American of birds, on a white table cloth before her children and grandchildren. Her husband, an approving look on his face, waits to demonstrate his skill with the carving knife." "Freedom from Want" evoked a civil ritual that fused family, country and God into a celebration. As Bellah indicated, Thanksgiving served "to integrate the family into the civil religion."

Quiet and intimate, "Freedom from Fear" focused upon the children's bedroom upstairs in a working family's home. The children's toys, a doll and a building block, were scattered on the floor, revealing their busy day at play and inviting viewers to recall similar scenes in their own homes. The mother tucked the children into bed, while father looked on, holding his newspaper and glasses. The scene was peaceful, except for the unsettling headline on the newspaper: "Bombing Ki-- Horror Hit--," and in smaller print: "Women and Children Slaughtered by Raids." These words revealed a possible threat to the tranquil life of the family. Ambiguity about whether the bombing occurred in Britain or the United States allowed the viewer to bring the threat into the home in the painting

as well as into their own homes. Few parents could have viewed this scene and not felt a responsibility to protect their own children.

The appeal to family in these paintings entailed additional features. The children in the paintings symbolized a vulnerable dependence upon the present generation to preserve the American way of living so that they might also enjoy the "good life." The children may also have represented hope for the future, and continuity in American traditions, as suggested in "Freedom from Want" by the placement of the youngest granddaughter nearest to the grandfather. Implicit in both "Freedom from Fear" and "Freedom from Want" was a definite family structure with father as bread-winner and mother tending to family needs; the women cooked food and tucked children into bed while father looked on approvingly and presided at the head of the table. The other paintings also contained a symbol of family, a wedding ring. The central figure in "Freedom of Worship," an elderly woman, wore a simple gold band as did the father in "Freedom from Fear" and the gentleman in the foreground, lower right of "Freedom of Speech." What more basic images for family could Rockwell have displayed than wedding rings and children with their parents?

Rockwell also appealed to institutionalized values associated with the community, the "family of man." Significantly, two of the four paintings depicted community gatherings, a town meeting and a gathering of religious figures. In "Freedom of Speech" a young man addressed the others in the community who were seated about him attentive to his ideas. The speaker was apparently a worker; he wore a tattered jacket, gray work pants, and a blue-collared shirt, and his hands were brown and weathered from outdoor labor. His appearance contrasted sharply with his listeners', who were well dressed in "Sunday" clothes and white collared shirts. For the most

part, the listeners were male and represented a range of ages and marital status, providing a spectrum of people with which the viewer could identify. While some words on the blue pamphlet in the foreground were missing, cut off at the edge of the painting, the visible portion read "--nual Report of the ____ Town of __ermont," and the viewer could easily read the scene as a town meeting. The blue pamphlet appeared in the workman's pocket, the married man's hand, and the elderly man's hand. Such repetition focused upon the purpose of the gathering, creating unity of purpose despite the spectrum of backgrounds of both people in the paintings and viewers of the paintings. The town meeting in "Freedom of Speech" and the religious community in "Freedom of Worship" both involved individuals of apparently divergent backgrounds respecting the others in the scene, possibly indicating a mutual understanding of their interdependence, possibly a recognition of the dignity of the individual participating in his own way to benefit the community as a whole. According to both Roosevelt and Rockwell, the Four Freedoms equaled milestones in the progress of mankind.

In addition, Rockwell appealed to institutionalized values associated with education. For example, in "Freedom of Speech" the town meeting may have occurred in a school room, since the background was a blackboard, a symbol of education that appeared in virtually every school room. At the same time, the meeting may have occurred in a church, since the people sit in pews. The ambiguity in scene allowed Rockwell to fuse educational and religious symbols into one scene, thereby broadening the potential basis for identification. The listeners in "Freedom of Speech" held copies of the annual report, a document that was understood only with reading skills. Again, in "Freedom of Worship" the Greek Orthodox churchman held

a book, a symbol of education. Finally, the father in "Freedom from Fear" held a newspaper and reading glasses.

Rockwell also strongly appealed to values associated with the work ethic. Suspenders in "Freedom from Fear," an apron in "Freedom from Want," and a tattered jacket in "Freedom of Speech" shared, as a common feature, the notion of labor. In "Freedom of Speech" Rockwell portrayed different occupational backgrounds with white and blue-collared workers. Of the virtues, the work ethic was essential: there were no apparently lazy or indifferent individuals in any of these paintings.

Finally, Rockwell appealed to American democracy and capitalism as a political system worthy of protection and maintenance. Many Americans regarded the town meeting as portrayed in "Freedom of Speech" as a public debate that was vital to the democratic process. In addition, "Freedom of Speech" emphasized occupational diversity under the capitalist system. The individuals in all of the paintings were middle class, having modest homes and modest incomes, and they attained their belongings through the capitalist system. Thanksgiving as stressed in "Freedom from Want" represented a time when the family gathered together to thank God and country for their bountiful gifts, and these gifts were typically regarded as a reward for the virtue of Americans who were hard working, faithful, and active citizens. In a sense, then, the American system of democracy and capitalism served to sum up the institutionalized values associated with the church, the family, the community, the educational system and the work ethic. Rockwell pictured these institutionalized values as constituting a simple, American way of living.

Because Hitler and Germany threatened cherished values in American life, because they would have undermined the American system and many

meaningful institutions, Hitler and Germany became the evil which had to be punished. Although the paintings themselves did not explicitly depict the German threat, the accompanying texts in the Post did describe that threat, reinforcing the need to protect America; hence the admonition to sacrifice.

The plentiful food on the table in "Freedom from Want" no doubt reminded the public of a sense of personal sacrifice for the country, since by that time the government was rationing food. Roosevelt's speeches and the accompanying texts in the Post reinforced the idea that the Four Freedoms meant fighting the pagan Germans, sacrificing self for country and freedom. "Buy War Bonds"on the posters and the support the war effort conclusions of the texts in the Post asked Americans to sacrifice to assure the reward of American virtue as manifest in their institutions and to assure the punishment of German evil.

CONCLUSION:

Norman Rockwell was clearly more than a capable illustrator. He was also a skillful rhetorician who aptly established identifications through epideictic icons. Rockwell's paintings are only one instance when political and religious values have been conjoined in icons. During the Civil War, for instance, Thomas Nast's illustrations such as "Christmas Eve, 1862," "Thanksgiving Day, 1863," and "The War in the West" mediated a very similar appeal among Americans, though it placed greater emphasis upon imagery of death and sacrifice. According to Morton Keller, Thomas Nast's "series of allegorial celebrations of national holidays caught--and heightened--the mix of patriotism, religiosity, and elevated moral purpose that gave important elements of Northern opinion the will to see the war through to its bloodied, weary end." Similar principles operate in other cultures

as well, sometimes in benign and sometimes in sinister forms. For example, during the Nazi years in Germany, such conjoined religious and political imagery served to generate fanatical support for the Nazi cause. Such use of visual symbols can be seen in The Dream that Was No More a Dream in which Bill Kinser and Neil Kleinman affirm that: "We discovered not only that a translation between German history and art was possible but that the Nazis had deliberately intensified the feedback between the two." Perhaps, then, the manner in which political and religious values are conjoined through icons merits future study as a unique type of rhetoric.